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#### Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications  
Phone: 320-589-6414, [weberm@morris.umn.edu](mailto:weberm@morris.umn.edu)

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer

Phone: 320-589-6068, [jrray@morris.umn.edu](mailto:jrray@morris.umn.edu)

### **Brabender '67-leyenda del baloncesto en Espana**

*Summary: Wayne Brabender, a UMM Cougar athlete and a 1967 graduate, is a basketball legend in his adopted country of Spain.*

(March 2, 2007)-University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) graduate Wayne Brabender's life has all the elements of a good story—an interesting main character, unexpected turns, competitive action, a bit of humor, and a beautiful, exotic setting. Basketball drives the plot and shapes a narrative rich with success. Although the tale continues—the ending far from written, Brabender's story is already a legend in his adopted country of Spain.

Brabender identifies his senior year of high school in Milan, Minnesota, as one of the first hurdles in his basketball career. An elbow to the forehead during play resulted in a serious injury, a fractured skull. Benched for most of the year, he only played the last six games of the season. Coach Al Swanson was there to witness his successful comeback and recruited him to play for his team at Willmar Junior College, now Ridgewater College.

"I had two good years at Willmar," reflects Brabender.

That's an understatement. In 1965, Willmar Junior College basketball went all the way to the national tournament, and Brabender received offers to finish his last two years of basketball action at universities across the nation.

Coach Swanson counseled Brabender regarding his college decision. "He said I wouldn't 'get lost' at Morris," remembers Brabender. "And Noel Olson, the UMM coach, was very 'down to earth.' I liked him."

#### Cougar success

The next exciting episode of Brabender's story would be played in Morris as a Cougar "basketball star," as the newspapers called him. In 1967, he was named Most Valuable Player, received Northern Intercollegiate Conference honors, and was selected as a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics All-American. Forty years after graduating from UMM, he continues to hold Cougar records: highest career scoring average at 23.6 highest season average points per game at 24.3 highest season total rebounds at 303 and single game most rebounds at 23.

Now for a humorous interlude...and a dramatic turn of events. The NBA Philadelphia 76ers drafted Brabender in 1967, but that summer, they happened to mention his name and his talents to a very famous Spanish coach representing Real Madrid, Spain's premiere basketball club. This event in Brabender's story is told on Real Madrid's Web site as an important part of the team's history:

"So mythical Pedro Ferrándiz went away to see this boy. To Morris, a small city in Minnesota, really far from Philadelphia. When he arrived, a very blond and very thin boy opens the door for him. Ferrándiz asks him for his older brother. 'My older brothers don't play basketball,' answers Wayne Brabender."

On first meeting, Brabender didn't match Ferrándiz's expectations. But after watching the tenacious guard play, Ferrándiz was convinced his skills would benefit Real Madrid. He invited Brabender to join the team. The young Minnesotan traveled to Spain to play the familiar game he loved in an unfamiliar place that would soon become home.

#### International achievements

Brabender played professional basketball with Real Madrid for 16 years, garnering 14 league championships, 7 Spanish Cup Championships, 3 International Cup Championships, 1 World Championship for Clubs, and 4 European Club Championships.

For 14 years, he played with the Spanish National Team earning a silver medal in the European championship and MVP of Europe in 1973. The following year, the Spanish National Team placed fifth in the world championship in Puerto Rico—an outstanding feat for Spanish basketball at the time, and Brabender received all-world first team honors.

The Olympics are also a chapter in Brabender's basketball career. He played in the Munich games in 1972 and the Moscow games in 1980 when the Spanish team took fourth place. In 1988, he was in Seoul as an assistant coach. Coaching has also brought Brabender success, at the professional level and at the club level. In 1989, under Brabender's leadership as head coach, Spain won the world SUP 22 championship.

#### Teaching and playing ball

This year, Brabender marks 40 years in Spain and almost as many as a Spanish citizen. The UMM experience—academics and relationships with fellow students and coaches—“has helped me throughout the years,” he says. He “validated” his UMM degree in Spain and now teaches physical education at a private school in Getafe, a position he enjoys very much. He makes his home in the historic city of Illescas.

Basketball remains a vital component of Brabender's story. He's the sports director at a successful basketball club, Club Deportivo Illescas, that has produced two championship teams. During the summer, he directs three basketball camps in Albacete, La Rua Ourense, and for La Fundación Real Madrid.

And Brabender—a member of the Cougar Hall of Fame and the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference Hall of Fame—is still playing basketball, 30-40 games per year throughout Spain and around the world. “It's a great way to keep promoting basketball,” he says.

Brabender calls himself and his teammates “the old timers.” Their official name is much more accurate: Real Madrid Leyendas del Baloncesto—basketball legends.

Wayne Brabender from the UMM 1966 Venture yearbook

Photo above: Wayne Brabender, courtesy of Real Madrid

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